



Brief from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne (FCFA) du Canada

**For the pre-budget consultations
2019 federal budget**

Ottawa, 2 August 2018

Recommendations

- That the government invest more in the bilingualism of Canadians by increasing funding for French-language elementary, secondary and post-secondary education. That it also improve the agreements on French-language services to better support the efforts of the provinces and territories in providing services to francophone communities.
- That any new investment in government programs developed for all Canadians include a targeted component for official language minority communities.
- That the government explore the possibility of linking certain federal programs normally channelled through the provinces, territories or municipalities with a francophone component delegated directly to community organizations and institutions.
- That the government implement the recommendations of the Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy Co-Creation Steering Group, and that it support francophone and Acadian community organizations to enable them to participate fully in this strategy.

Introduction

The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada (FCFA) is the national voice of 2.7 million French-speaking Canadians living in minority communities in nine provinces and three territories.

In every region of the country, our communities are creating, innovating and generating wealth, in French. Year after year, the FCFA makes recommendations to the Standing Committee on Finance aimed at increasing the contribution and impact of our communities on Canada's competitiveness. The FCFA is pleased to note that several of the recommendations in its 2017 brief were incorporated into the new *2018–2023 Action Plan for Official Languages*. The latter includes a significant increase in direct investments to communities and NPOs that create and invigorate life in French.

The leverage effect: building on Action Plan investments

For the first time in more than 10 years, in the new *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023* the Government of Canada is directly prioritizing investments to francophone and Acadian community organizations and institutions. And for good reason: the fact that there are opportunities to live in French outside Quebec is largely due to the 100 or so community and cultural centres across the country; the more than 700 schools in which 160 000 students enrol each year; the 21 bilingual and French-language post-secondary institutions; the 16 French-language health services development networks; the 13 francophone immigration networks; and the many local francophone organizations.

In addition to their role in creating and maintaining a francophone social and economic space, these organizations belong to a sector that is recognized for its impacts on social, cultural and environmental missions, job creation and contribution to economic growth.

As the chief economist for the non-profit sector at Imagine Canada points out, the non-profit sector employs some 2 million people and accounts for a larger share of gross domestic product than the automotive or forestry industries.¹

This sector is also responsible for much of the innovation, creativity and efficiency in service delivery across the country. This is also true for the organizations and institutions in our communities: between 2005 and 2018, they had to deal with both a freeze on federal investments and a substantial increase in the francophone and francophile population, and therefore an increase in demand for services and activities in French.

¹ Emmett, Brian, Blog, 13 February 2017, [Le déficit social: notre témoignage au caucus ouvert du Sénat](#).

The money invested in the new Action Plan will provide for the catching-up that has been needed for many years. This is indeed catching up, however, rather than long-term momentum. If support for community NPOs is limited to Action Plan investments, we will ultimately be faced with the same major challenges that characterized the last decade. That is why it will be necessary for the government to provide indexation of its investments to maintain the capacity for action and innovation in the medium and long term.

Filling some gaps in the Action Plan

The government chose to invest in community organizations and institutions, and that was very necessary. However, two important components – the federal-provincial-territorial agreements in French-language education and on services – must also be improved to ensure the full participation of francophones and francophiles in Canada's economic growth and competitiveness.

Given the importance for Canada of diversifying its international trading partners, we believe it is essential to build on the strengths of a bilingual and multilingual population. In a study conducted in 2013 for the Réseau d'employabilité et de développement économique (RDÉE) and the Corporation d'employabilité et de développement communautaire (CEDEC), the Conference Board of Canada confirmed that knowledge of French in Quebec and New Brunswick had greatly increased opportunities for commercial exchanges with francophone countries.² By setting targets to expand bilingualism among Canadians and increase the demographic weight of francophones outside Quebec to 4% by 2036, the government has recognized the economic and cultural potential of a more bilingual population.

In addition, many of the services that citizens receive are under provincial and territorial responsibility. It is important that these services also be available in French in order to expand bilingual living environments across Canada. To that end, the federal government must provide more support for provincial and territorial efforts.

For these reasons, and provided that the provinces and territories are open to working with their francophone communities and to being accountable for the federal investments received, the FCFA recommends that **the government invest more in the bilingualism of Canadians by increasing funding for French-language elementary, secondary and post-secondary education. That it improve the agreements on French-language services to better support the efforts of the provinces and territories in providing services to francophone communities.**

² Joint RDÉE, CEDEC news release, 19 June 2013, [*Conference Board of Canada Study, reveals that the knowledge of both official languages is an asset to the Canadian Economy.*](#)

Integrating a francophone perspective into federal initiatives and programs...

The investments in the *Action Plan for Official Languages* affect several federal institutions and key community development sectors. However, the Action Plan cannot be the be-all and the end-all of the federal government's commitments to support official language minority communities.

Year after year, the government invests in a variety of programs and initiatives – whether for infrastructure improvements, training and essential skills, immigrant settlement, or support for early childhood and families – that share the common goal of helping Canadians from diverse backgrounds participate in Canada's economic growth.

However, the mere fact that a federal program is open to the entire population does not mean that it produces benefits for francophone minority communities. The funding invested in the Youth Employment Strategy through the 2016 federal budget is ample demonstration: in the summer of 2016, only 62 of the 40 000 jobs promised had gone to young people in francophone and Acadian communities. The government had to announce specific youth employment measures for our communities to correct this situation.

That is why the FCFA recommends **that any new investment in government programs developed for all Canadians include a targeted component for official language minority communities**. This recommendation is consistent with the approach announced by the government with respect to recipients of funding for major public infrastructure projects, who will now have to consider the social and economic impacts in communities and examine training and job creation opportunities for under-represented groups.³

...and federal investments transferred to other governments

The federal government transfers significant amounts to provincial and territorial governments in areas such as health, training, employment and infrastructure. These transfers are designed to ensure that Canadians receive equivalent services no matter where they live in the country.

Do these funds produce equivalent benefits for francophones in terms of services in their language? That depends on the willingness of each province or territory to look after its linguistic minority, and such willingness is neither consistent nor uniform.

³ Infrastructure Canada, News release, [The Government of Canada encourages community employment benefits through infrastructure projects](#), 22 June 2018.

This is even truer when federal investments are channelled through municipalities. It is difficult for francophones to influence decisions when they represent only 3% or 4% of the population, even when they are concentrated in a neighbourhood or sector of a municipality.

In the fall of 2016, the FCFA recommended that Infrastructure Canada create an envelope within Canada's infrastructure funding that would be reserved for francophone minority communities. This envelope would be administered under a federal-community partnership, and would apply in areas where francophones are unable to influence municipal priorities.

The FCFA therefore recommends **that the government explore the possibility of linking certain federal programs normally channelled through the provinces, territories or municipalities with a francophone component delegated directly to community organizations and institutions.**

Supporting the capacity of francophone communities for social innovation

The Government of Canada has recently been looking at social innovation and social finance as a response to a variety of societal problems. The government created the Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy Co-creation Steering Group, which will provide the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour with recommendations on the action and investments required to enable NPOs and charities to fully participate in the shift to social innovation.

Many of the issues addressed by this approach overlap with the challenges facing francophone and Acadian communities. For example, the rate of francophones with low literacy skills in some regions of the country is particularly high compared with the majority. Moreover, a study conducted by Canadian Heritage shows that in some regions, francophones are less likely than their majority counterparts to hold a post-secondary diploma.

For that reason, the FCFA recommends **that the government implement the recommendations of the Social Innovation and Social Finance Strategy Co-Creation Steering Group, and that it support francophone and Acadian community organizations to enable them to participate fully in this strategy.**

Conclusion

Economic data on NPOs and charities are fragmentary at best, particularly with regard to francophones in minority settings. This gap must be addressed in order to better integrate this sector into Canada's economic profile and forecasts.

The available data do show, however, that francophone and Acadian communities increased their productivity and their contribution to the Canadian economy between 1996 and 2011.⁴ The government recognized the value of this contribution by prioritizing organizations and institutions in our communities in the *Action Plan for Official Languages 2018–2023*. This is a positive step forward, but more is needed to give new impetus to Canada’s linguistic duality and ensure that francophone minorities are, as much as the rest of Canadians, in a position to contribute fully to the country’s economic development.

⁴ Équipe de recherche, Direction des langues officielles, ministère du Patrimoine canadien, Profils socio-économiques Canada 1996-2011, novembre 2017